

[William Riley Angermiller]

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by

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Range Tales and Cowboy Experiences UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

WILLIAM RILEY ANGERMILLER

Marfa, Texas.

William Riley Angermiller, whose grandfather and grandmother came to Texas from Germany about 1858, is a native of Bee County, Texas. He was born September 10, 1875, and while not of the age of our pioneer consultants heretofore, is a cowboy of the old days and worked many years under one of the ablest and oldest cattlemen in West Texas. He owes much of his knowledge to his association with that veteran of the plains, the late J. W. Henderson of Ozona. Having handled many round-ups and driven many herds to the shipping points, he is well versed in range lore and saw hardships and routine work through the eyes of a humorist.

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Uvalde has been his home for about eighteen years though he is managing a ranch at present southwest of Marfa, Texas, close to Ruidoso. At a recent interview, he recounted the following incidents of his cowboy days:

"I was brought up to handle stock from the time I could walk. I even learned to plow by the time I was ten years old and thought I was grown then. We were living in Bee County then having moved from Karnes County, on the San Antonio River where I was born. But the first outside job I ever undertook away from home was on the Fred Cockrell ranch near Anson on the Clear Fork of the Brazos. Me and another boy left home down in Bee County and started out to find a job up at Colorado City and 'make a fortune.' We were broke by the time we got to Yoakum so we caught 2 a freight and rode for a long ways but we didn't know how to ride a freight except to [?] from the ride. A [?] came along and told us to get off of the train and get off right now. The boy I was with says, "We can't get off with the train running like it is, but if you'll stop, we'll get off.' The [?] got raw and said we were going to get off anyway. He began kicking the boy's hands where he was holding to the rail and this boy reached for his gun with one hand and fell from the train. The [?] started for me then but I pulled my gun and fired at him. About that time the train began slowing up and when it came to a stop, I got off and started back to where I thought [?] was. He got such a fall, I was sure he was killed. I hadn't gone very far when I [??] coming right up the railroad track.

"We didn't know what they [?] do to us, so we laid out around there for about three days and nearly starved to death. Finally, we made it to a little grocery store and we were determined to have something to eat no matter how we had to get it. We walked into the store and began ordering everything we wanted to eat. We ate and ate and had the fellow opening cans and slicing cheese till we couldn't hold any more. Once in awhile, the storekeeper would come by and ask us how we were getting along. I guess he could see we were starved. Well, you never saw such a mess as we had there on that counter. We

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had no idea what we were going to do about paying for the stuff, but we didn't care right then.

"After a little, some more customers came into the store and that fellow got busy with them and we slipped out the back door. We went walking off as full as ticks. We thought he might try to overtake us but we never did hear anything of it and kept going.

"We circled around and it the same railroad train and caught another freight. That time we didn't get caught but rode on in to Colorado City.

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My friend had some relatives there and we went to see them but we soon saw they didn't have any work for us and I decided I might as well hunt a job. We had some awful experiences before we found work but I went to work on the Cockrell ranch for fifteen dollars a month. I had shipped my saddle up there when I left Bee County, so I didn't have to buy a saddle. I worked about four months and had about forty-eight dollars saved up when I quit. Then I bought a new trunk and didn't have anything to put in it but my saddle. We never let go of our saddles or guns. I hit the train for home after I bought that trunk.

"I left home several times like that and had all kinds of experiences before I went to work on the [?] ranch west of Ozena. I was about twenty-one years old then. My brother and I started in grubbing a ten-acre field. We sure slayed those little mosquitos too. At the end of the month, the boss came down to our camp and told me he would give me twenty-five dollars a month to work on the ranch greasing windmills. That sure suited me. I got to riding then, going to the windmills. I knew how to work stock all the time, but they didn't know it, so when they would work stock I would help them. Next thing I knew they put me in the outfit. From that on, I got up to handling the herds. The last four years I was there, I didn't do anything but just ride around and see after things.

"I have taken many a herd across country to the shipping points — maybe ninety or a hundred mile drive. We generally took two herds of cattle to San Angelo to ship. The first

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was a herd of steers and next would be territory cattle. They were called territory cattle as they were old bulls and cows they would buy to take up to the territory (Oklahoma) to fatten. We would take 1,500 or 2,000 head up every spring and about that many steers. We never had less than 1,500 in any herd that went up.

"We had plenty of stampedes on these drives. Nearly anything would 4 stampede a herd especially striking matches to smoke. A horse shaking his saddle or any sudden noise would stampede them. The cattle are still and go to sleep when they have stampedes. But these runs can be avoided if the right kind of guards are with them. You don't want to get quiet. I never did have but one stampede when I was on guard. That was a man striking a match. He got run over too. They run over his horse and knocked him down. He was right in the way they were coming and when his horse fell, it turned the herd but several trampled his horse and him too. It mashed him up pretty bad. I know he must have been stopped that time. You are never supposed to stop but just keep riding all the time. Whenever the cattle were quiet and didn't run, there would be a regular trail beat out around that herd next morning where the horses had traveled round the herd meeting the other riders. And it was always the steers that stampeded. We had three-year-olds up and they were big steers. These cows never did stampede.

"There would be from twelve to fifteen men, sometimes twenty. Sometimes there would be one wagon and sometimes two. When we took the steers up, we had one wagon, but generally two wagons when we took the territory cattle. One of the wagons was a 'calf-wagon.' The cows would bring calves in the spring and we had to haul the new-born calves. I sure didn't like that [?] cow buisness. I loved to drive steers; they would get up and milk like horses. You could string 'em out two or three miles long and it was as pretty a sight as I ever want to see. When they are dry for water and you get close to where they can smell it, that is when they are hell to hold. But they drive better when they are dry. I always worked in the lead and when you et up on high places and look back and see

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them coming for miles, it looks like a snake crawling. All of them coming the same way and taking the same step just like soldiers.

“The wagon always went on and struck camp for the / boss always told 5 the cook where to strike camp and he went ahead. And when we come to camp, there was always/ a night guard detailed to watch the cattle. The rest of us kept a horse ready at camp in case of a run, no matter what time we were supposed to go on guard. Some of the boys would keep a half-broke horse up for that work but I never did. I always kept the very best horse I had, s saddled and ready, for it was the most dangerous part of the work. I wanted a gentle horse and a fast one. Those horses knew what to do and always knew by the time you got to them which way the herd had gone and they would be gone after them like a flash. The men who kept their no-account horses up never would be in the run at all. Maybe their horses would break loose and go to pitching and it would take them an hour to get on.

“The 7N Ranch was the J. W. Henderson ranch went of Ozona and I nearly always stood guard with Johnny Henderson (his son) or the old man , himself. Johnny was a sleepy-head and I would always have a time getting him out of bed when it came our time to stand guard.

“One night, one of the guards rode in to wake us up for our turn and I got up and got my coffee. I couldn't raise Johnny so I decided to get him up one way or another. I went to his bed where he and the old man were sleeping and I raised up the foot of the cover and got the old man by the feet thinking it was Johnny, and pulled him clear out of the bed on the frosty ground before I discovered that it was Old Man Henderson instead of Johnny. He asked me what the hell I wanted and I told him I wanted him to get up. He said, 'Aw-right.' Then I saw it was the old man, I said, 'Hell, you can go back to bed; I got the wrong fellow.' Johnny got up about then and wanted to know what the row was about and the old man said he might as well get up too. Johnny got his coffee and we rode on out to the herd and stood guard.

"I witnessed one of the biggest cattle slayings on a big ranch that I ever took place between two ranchmen in Texas, I guess. The old man I was working for owned lots of land and he would have men to take up land around there and sell it to him after they had established their claims. Once he got a fellow to take up about four sections right in the middle of his ranch. [?????] It had fine grass and a big tank of water on it. When the settler proved up his claim, he sold it to a neighbor instead of the old man. Well, the old man was plenty sore. He came in one day and asked me if I would take some poison down to the salt troughs. He said he was going to 'clean that outfit up.' I refused to take it down there but I told him I would keep it quiet if he wanted to go ahead. He had already had the poison fixed up and so he took it on down to the salt troughs. The cattle wanted salt anyway and next day you could see cattle lying all over the place. It was the place that the settler had sold to the neighbor, you see, and the very land the old man had been using for years. When the settler sold the land, the other outfit took possession and put cattle there. He got about two-hundred head that time when he put the poison out in the salt troughs. That started a war with this neighbor outfit and of all the cattle stealing, killing and [?] that took place between two outfits, it did then. These boys in the neighbor outfit weren't letting the old man get the best of them. They rolled his cattle, broke their necks, shot them, branded the calves and drove them off till it was getting so bad, somebody had to be riding all the time. It soon became necessary for somebody to be stationed down in the lower part of the pasture next to the dividing fence. I agreed to go down to the house on that side and stay there. Well, I knew it was going to end in murder if it wasn't stopped so I got in touch with the outfit and told 'em that there was going to be more and more trouble if it went on and if they would agree to quit that cattle slaughtering right now, I'd see to it that our outfit quit right now.

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They wanted to know if I knew what I was talking about and if I could guarantee that our outfit would quit for good if they did. I told 'em that it was the only way to stop and I'd guarantee that there would be no more from that time on. They finally agreed to it so I

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went back and told the old man what I'd done and I got them all to agree to it and there wasn't ever any more trouble. I got to know those neighbor boys awful well from that time and never had better friends in my life. They have stuck by me for years and always been my friends.

“One of the best horses I ever owned was a brown horse about fourteen and a-half hands high that I called Culberson. He was extra good for everything that a horse could be used for. He was gentle and I could shoot a gun on him and I could pull off the saddle and turn him wild-loose and he wouldn't leave that saddle. He would graze all around it but wouldn't get out of sight of it. I would go catch him at night or call him and he would come. And I could rope anything in the world on him. I roped a mustang horse on him once. There was lots of mustangs down in Five Oak County then. There was about twenty or twenty-five head in the herd and I picked me out one — a young horse — and my horse just outran him. I run on to him in the [?] kind of country where there was cat-claw, mesquite, live-oak, gusjilla, and everything that had a thorn on it. I got him in a little opening and threw my rope on him and got him right around the neck. I had to choke him down and hackimore him, then I took him in necked right up to the horn of the saddle. It don't take long to get one going all right when you cut him off from the bunch that way.

“This horse, Culberson, liked to work cattle. He was good at anything you put him at, a fast runner and good swimmer. A horse has to be fast to catch one of those wild mustangs. It sure took a good one. Culberson never was a mean-natured horse, but I damn sure remember one that was. He was the 8 meanest I ever rode.

“I struck him down in Commanche County. He was a big, brown billy-horse, or quarter-horse. He didn't have no name, he was just an outlaw that nobody could ride and he had even killed one man, a Negro. I didn't know that at the time. They already had him gentle and had him up feeding him oats all winter and you could saddle him up as easy as you please.

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"I was breaking horses for a dollar a year. That meant their ages. If they was five years old, I got five dollars. At that time, I was up in that county breaking horses all around there and they heard of me down below there and came down to see if I would break this horse. They offered me ten dollars and they told me that several fellows had tried to ride him but failed.

"Well, I went down there. They had him in a pen and he was the prettiest horse I nearly ever saw. I first got on him there in the pen but he never did a thing. I told them to open the gate and when they did, he made for it. The boy that was riding with me couldn't stay anywhere near him. He ran till I thought he would run clear off the earth. He was making right for a fence and I knew he was going right into it. I didn't know how to stop him except to spur him in the shoulder, as I pulled my foot out of the stirrup and spurred him in the shoulder. Good gracious! He left the earth! He pitched pretty good for a little while, but not hard.

"I knew when I saw fifteen or twenty fellows collected up at the corrals and sitting on the fence the day I got there to ride him, that something unusual was up. And I could see when I rode him from the pen that he was a dangerous horse. Well, after he quit pitching that spell, I rode him back into the pen. Then, I had this other boy that was riding another horse, lead him across a lane to an open pasture where he couldn't be running in a fence. When we got him through that gate into the open pasture, I got on him. These men all left the corrals and came down there to see the fun and that horse didn't disappoint 'em. He pitched for a half-hour, I know, the hardest and highest pitching any horse could do. He never [?] once but did everything in the world to get me off. I began to wonder which of us would last the longest for I knew I was hurt already, but I rode him till he quit. When I got off, I was pale and my nose was bleeding and one of my hips was sort of out of place.

"That horse broke every string in my saddle and finally broke the right stirrup loose. I sure had a good saddle but he tore it all to pieces. The saddle pockets were torn loose from

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the saddle where they were sewed. I thought lots of those saddle pockets and I had them sewed back, but he pitched that sixty-dollar saddle all to pieces.

“When that right stirrup broke, I knew it did something to my back and hip. The doctor said that it was the strain and it hurt my hip someway and I never did get ever it. My right leg has always been a fraction shorter than the other and there was a joint in my backbone thrown out of place. Well, I got off and got the saddle off and rested while the other boy worked on the saddle and got it rigged up again. Then I put it back on him and he started again. He couldn't pitch like he did at first and I poured it on him every jump. We had ten miles to go to my camp that evening and every three or four-hundred yards he would down his head and try it again. When we got to camp, he couldn't jump over a foot off of the ground. He would do his best for a few jumps and then quit. All the way down there he would run into brush and under limbs trying to get me off.

“I never had been very sore from riding broncs but the next morning, I sure was sore. I dreaded that horse more then any I had ever rode, but I knew I couldn't let him get the best of me then; I would have to ride 10 him. So I saddled him up and [?] an him prepared for a real cattle. He never offered to pitch another jump. He was so gentle, I could ride him bareback the next day. He was such a pretty horse I tried to buy him off of those fellows but they were so tickled to get him broke, they wouldn't part with him at all.

“It used to be real roping in the days when they roped those big steers. It took a sure-'nough man and a good horse to rope / those big old steers in roping contests. I think Clay McCensyle and John Murr Murray were the best ropers I ever saw. It sure took good roping to rope and tie them and these boys always took the money. They were bound to be the best.

“I've killed two or three mean bulls at different times to save my horse. [??] you have to kill one when he is tied to a horse after you rope 'im and didn't throw 'im. You can't throw one,

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hardly at all. They are so heavy and stout, you can't use an ordinary rope on 'em, you have to have a big rope. They will sure break a rope for you.

“One of the darndest jobs I ever got into was roping bulls. They were fighting all the time and gutting one another and Old Man Henderson decided he would de-horn every bull on the ranch. We'd get a pen full of bulls at a time and two of us would get in there with a rope and the rest of the waddies would try to get 'em down. One of us would rope him by the head and one by the foot. I bet I broke a-hundred ropes. We would get 'em down and saw their horns off right next to the head, and fight! They would fight a circle-saw. There was about a-thousand big, old bulls on that ranch. We had about thirty-thousand head of cattle there. There may have been two-thousand head of bulls, I don't know, but I guess there was, counting the young ones and all. He wasn't paying taxes on more than ten-thousand cattle. He raised the devil about them assaying that many once and said he didn't have that many cattle. The commissioners said 'All right, Mr. Henderson, 11 we'll just round 'em up and count 'em.' He said, 'By God, you wont, either. There was about three-hundred sections of land and nothing on it but cattle. We worked that whole country when we set in de-horning those bulls. That was about the awfulest job I ever got into.

“But, right there on that ranch I saw the biggest round-up I ever saw throwed together. There was about eight-thousand head of cattle. There was three-hundred U steers got in his pasture and he wanted to get them out and wanted to round up his steers too. I never saw as many cattle throwed up on the side of a mountain in my life. We had a tenderfoot working on the ranch we called Pennsylvania. We cut cattle and cut cattle till my horse played out. Finally, there wasn't anybody left in the herd cutting but the old man and I rode over to Pennsylvania and decided to have some fun. All the other boys' horses had played out and my horse got to where he would pitch every time I rode him back into the herd so I had to pull out too. So the old man had it all to himself and I told Pennsylvania the old man and to get in that herd and help out those cattle. He said that would just suit him fine so he busted into that herd and slashed 'em right and left. He didn't know what to do when he got into a herd but he knew the boys were in there doing something. He got in there

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and if he didn't make cattle scatter! We couldn't even hold the herd together. The old man never noticed him for a long time and Pennsylvania was having the time of his life. We were all sitting on our horses out to the side laughing our heads off for we knew the old man was already mad, anyway. Well, when he finally looked up and saw Pennsylvania making those wild breaks through that herd, the old man gave a beller and made a run at poor old Pennsylvania and yelled at him to get to hell out of there. Pennsylvania didn't know what had come over the old man but he didn't stop to find out. He fairly laid the quirt on that old pony and come out of there, his jacket flying straight out in the back 12 and the old pony's ears laid down flat. The old man was so outdone, he give up cutting that big herd and turned all the cattle loose and quit.

"I don't know what ever become of Pennsylvania, but I think he went back home. We had more fun out of him than anybody I ever saw. He wasn't afraid of these broncs at first but he got busted so much, he got shy and quit 'em. A fellow like him — we'd always make anything up on him in kangaroo court and convict him. He would try to fight 'em sometimes when they made up something that made him too mad, but it didn't do no good.

"There would be some of the dangeest pleading of cases in those kangaroo courts you ever heard in your life. There would be a lawyer there and a fellow proscuting the cases. Laugh! It would tickle a dog. The attorneys would do some of the darndest arguing you ever heard but they always had a judge and had to hurry through the cases, they had so many to try. I bet I've helped whip a thousand old boys. They made laws that couldn't be broke without getting tried and no matter what the complaint was, you were always convicted. You never could prove yourself innocent. There would be every sort of complaint you could imagine. Some of the boys would pretend to have got a shock while they was out rounding up and saw some other fellow who didn't know he had been seen and they would have a doctor there to examine this fellow's heart to see if the shock had hurt him and of course the doctor always pronounced it bad. Some would claim they had been insulted by one or the other boys either saying something in his presence or not being particular in what he had done and of course that was a bad offense. If it hadn't been for something like this

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going on when all the boys were out for weeks on a drive in all kinds of weather and no amusement of any kind, it would have been unbearable. They were determined to have some fun no matter how they had to have it or who it was on.

"I remember one time there were two old boys come there at the ranch 13 wanting to work and they took 'em in and let 'em try to work some. I had a good friend there on the ranch and we decided to have some fun out of the boys. We got to where we would always be quarreling when we come in at night and he would get these old boys off and tell 'em how mean I was. All the other boys were on to it and would try to separate us if our arguments got too hot. Those boys would watch me and would sort of take my friend's part when we would get to quarreling till he had 'em ready to fight for him. Finally, he got 'em to agree that they would just whip me and then he and I made it up to pull a good gun fight that night. So we took our cartridges out of our pistols and took the bullets out so nobody would get hurt and that night we commenced quarreling after we started to bed and we sure got bad. Those old boys had got up as they knew they were supposed to help whip me, so we kept quarreling till we both pulled our guns and I shot at him. He fell back on his bed like I'd really shot 'im and said, ' He He's killed me!' Of course I kept shooting but I didn't have anything much to shoot at because these old boys had jumped like deer and were running toward the ranch house. I went to shooting in their direction and we saw the biggest one of 'em run into the corner of the house and I never saw a fellow get such a fall or such a lick as he got. He jumped up and I fired again and they lit out around the house. They had intended to run into the house but they didn't have time. They hid out around there till late that night and slipped around and stole their horses out and left. We never did see or hear of them any more. The boss got up ready to tear the ranch up next morning. We had kept him awake and run his hands off and he wasn't in a very good humor.

"There was always something going on at all those big ranches. They kept a good many hands all the time and they could think of plenty to do. As a general rule, those ranchmen were as good men as were ever born. I 14 never worked where I wasn't treated well. But after I left the 7Ns, I bought a ranch of my own out on the Pesos River, as I had

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accumulated stock of my own and I knew I could run any kind of a ranch I ever saw. Old Man Henderson tried to discourage me from the idea at first, but when he saw I was determined to go, he told me I was doing the right thing and said he knew I would make good.”

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